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Whalen Abstract

Environmental Setbacks in Physical Health: How Where You Live Can Make You Sick

There is no doubt that lack of access to medical care has a negative impact on one's health. However, the simple presence of medical facilities in an area does not correlate to superb health due to confounding factors that may still prevent people from reaching facilities. Various factors hinder peoples' ability to receive the medical care present at facilities such as distance from the medical center, family dynamic, environment, stigma of health injuries, and medical insurance costs. Why is it that even in areas where medical treatment is accessible, and in some cases, free to the public, cases of both communicable and non-communicable diseases have not decreased?

To gather data and information for this project, research as well as observation were utilized. I conducted a literature review focused on the public health system in Cuba along with how environmental factors such as pollution and food availability affect the health of a population. In addition, I conducted database research on Salamanca, New York (a native American community) and London, England. Lastly I also participated in observation gathering all three locations.

As observed by traveling to Salamanca, New York, there is a lack of medical facilities along with a lack of grocery stores to purchase healthy foods. Community conditions such as the lack of running water and lack of heat in houses makes living conditions difficult for residents. Poverty among families also promotes poor health and increases incidence of sickness and violence.

Cuba's free public health system emphasizes preventative care and constant treatment. However, the heavy industrialization of Havana may have an impact on respiratory health. Rates of obesity are also increasing as government-subsidized foods such as rice and meat make up the majority of the common diet. Poverty and poor sanitation (lack of plumbing and in various cases, running water) contribute to a steady rate of communicable diseases.

London, encompasses both the wealthiest and the poorest people in the country. Although there are medical facilities present, air pollution is elevated and health ailments such as asthma and other upper respiratory conditions are prevalent.

Researchers such as María Del C. Quintana Hechavarría, R.S. Cooper, Margot Sanger-katz, Carolina Moser, and J. Stewart all discuss the connection between various aspects of the environment and health outcomes in a community. The aspects of the environment that affect health outcomes include violence, air quality, sanitation, availability of running water, poverty, and availability of healthy whole foods.

Although all three locations differ in their levels of exposure in each of these categories, these locations are all inextricably linked with the fact that despite the availability of medical care in various cities both domestically and internationally such as in London and Havana, Cuba, rates of communicable and non-communicable diseases have not significantly decreased over

time. Environmental health severely impacts the physical health of the residents within the area. The culture of a people in an area has an effect on situational outlook and thus either improves or suppresses mental health which directly links to physical health in terms of disease incidence and prevalence.

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